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ABSTRACT

Our nation's youth dropout rate, while consistent for almost 20 years, has increasingly become a major educational and societal problem. This summary of a longer sourcebook provides an overview of various strategies and initiatives for groups, schools, businesses, and communities to consider in addressing their dropout problems, and describes a range of approaches to redirect potential dropouts or those already out of school. The following 14 regional programs are described: (1) Twelve-Together (Detroit, Michigan); (2) Adopt-a-Student (Atlanta, Georgia); (3) Summer Youth Employment Program (New Bedford, Massachusetts); (4) Secondary Credit Exchange Program (Washington State); (5) Murray-Wright High School Day-Care Center (Detroit, Michigan); (6) Adolescent Primary Health Care Clinic (Houston, Texas); (7) Job Readiness Program (Chicago, Illinois); (8) Project COFFEE (Oxford, Massachusetts): (9) Rich's Academy (Atlanta, Georgia); (10) Alternative Schools Network (Chicago, Illinois); (11) Educational Clinics (Washington State); (12) A Systemic Approach to Dropout Prevention (New York City); (13) Dropout Prevention and Recovery Program (Los Angeles, California); and (14) Boston Compact (Boston, Massachusetts). The most effective programs are those that target groups at risk of dropping out and those that offer systematic redress of the educational system to encompass a broader range of learning needs. Information on where to get more details about each of the programs is provided. A list of references is included. (BJV)

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A Summary of Solutions

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WHAT TO DO ABOUT YOUTH DROPOUTS?

A Summary of Solutions

by
Margaret Terry Orr

July 1987

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INTRODUCTION

Overview

Our nation's youth dropout rate, while consistent for almost 20 years, has increasingly become a major educational and societal problem. As many as 25 percent of the youth entering high school never graduate. As our technological society has come to require greater skill and knowledge, employment and economic opportunities for youth dropouts have become quite limited. Business and industry have become increasingly dependent upon a poorly prepared work force to fill entry-level positions, thereby adding to their training and production costs. Added to this are the social costs for supporting the many who cannot obtain employment. As a result, the projected costs for youth dropouts' lack of educational preparation are enormous, both for the dropouts themselves and for our society at large.

Policy-makers, planners and program managers from the education and employment and training fields are now searching for solutions to prepare youth dropouts educationally and vocationally. A review of our schools, employment and training programs, and community agencies reveals the existence of broad and diverse program activities. But available educational and support services are insufficient to meet the needs of this sizable portion of the total youth population. More important, only scant information exists on the nature and utility of program solutions. This summary provides an in-depth look at 14 programs and a framework for planning targeted and comprehensive approaches to reducing the dropout rate.

About the Summary

The summary and the sourcebook upon which it is based provide an overview of various strategies and initiatives for groups, schools, businesses, and communities to consider in addressing their dropout problems. The summary's content is structured to describe a range of approaches to redirect potential dropouts or those already out of school. It presents an organizing and planning framework of dropout prevention and service solutions for policy-makers and program operators.

The summary can serve as a focal point for discussion and organization for interest groups, such as parent groups and advocacy organizations. Public school principals and superintendents and administrators of public and private employment and training programs can use it to consider program strategies and options for their own students. And policy-makers—such as legislators, agency officials, and policy boards—can use it to address concerns with respect to various target groups.

The planning framework outlined in this summary is illustrated with 14 differently structured programs for potential dropouts and out-of-school youth. Each program description summarizes how the program was designed, its target population and program curriculum, and the administration and funding and examines the available evidence of the program's effectiveness.

Research and Acknowledgments

Through extensive consultation with educators, trainers, and policy and program specialists, we developed a framework for designing programs and appropriate service strategies aimed at the youth dropout problem. Fourteen programs were selected to represent a range of approaches and were identified through a wide search of education and employment and training programs and projects. Each program was visited by a team of researchers who interviewed directors, staff, and students and observed classes and other program activities. In-depth case summaries were prepared and reviewed twice by program directors. We wish to acknowledge the assistance of over 50 educators, planners, and researchers who recommended programs for consideration. We thank the many program staff who described their efforts, answered endless questions, and reviewed draft summaries in the preparation of this report.

The research of the programs and the production of the sourcebook was carried out with the assistance and input of an advisory group, representing national organizations, agencies and universities concerned about the dropout problem. The research and production of this summary and the sourcebook upon which it is based were supported by grants from the Carnegie Corporation

of New York. We thank our program officers, Diane August and Vivien Stewart, for their efforts.

We also thank the Hispanic Policy Development Project for its guidance and assistance in the preparation and distribution of the summary findings. Mary Lutton O'Connor did a thorough and effective job of summarizing 14 programs and copy-editing and laying out the text. James Meier, Hannah Rosen, Katherine Solow, and John Whalen assisted in researching the 14 programs. We thank Ron Monroe and Joan Woodbridge for their excellent production work in the summary's preparation.

Structured Employment/Economic Development Corporation (SEEDCO) is a New York–based nonprofit organization concerned with economic and community development, employment training, education, the arts, and other public policy issues. SEEDCO has extensively evaluated the impact of federal and local job training programs in serving disadvantaged groups, particularly youth dropouts. We thank SEEDCO's past and present presidents—Gary Walker, William Grinker, and James Pickman—for their support and guidance on this project.

This summary was extracted from the forthcoming book *Keeping Students in School*, by Margaret Terry Orr, which provides more comprehensive and in-depth coverage of the programs, issues, and conclusions summarized here. Scheduled for publication in November 1987, this hardbound book of approximately 260 pages is tentatively priced at $22.95. To obtain copies, please use the enclosed order card or write to Jossey-Bass Inc., Publishers, 433 California Street, San Francisco, California 94104.

IS DROPPING OUT A REAL PROBLEM?

It is estimated that between 14 and 25 percent of students entering high school nationwide will drop out. Responding to this persistent problem requires many solutions. The causes of dropping out are numerous and stem from many of the economic and social circumstances that are closely related to other youth problems, including adolescent parenthood, unemployment, drug abuse, and crime.

The solution is not simply to make existing schools and programs more attractive to encourage dropout-prone students to stay. The interrelated causes and problems of dropping out call for comprehensive multiservice approaches to prevent students from leaving school too early and to help those who have left to complete their education and obtain employment.

The heightened public attention to what is now recognized as a crisis in education has triggered widespread and varied responses. These range from collaborations between businesses and schools for new program efforts, to targeted state funding and programs, and to wholesale changes in a school district's delivery of education services. Understanding the nature and causes of our country's youth dropout problem can better inform us on how to capitalize on these responses and design appropriate programs.

What Is a Dropout?

A dropout can be defined as a student who withdraws from school without a high school diploma and without enrolling elsewhere. However, schools and communities still have difficulty agreeing on a uniform definition of what youth dropouts are and when a former student is officially recognized as one. One reason is that being a dropout is not a clear status. Students may be absent for extended periods of time or may withdraw or transfer without notifying the school.

School systems use different methods to estimate the number of dropouts, reflecting differences in policies on when students can officially withdraw from school before graduation. They also vary widely in acknowledging as dropouts the many students who rarely attend school or who leave without official notification and without enrolling elsewhere.

How Big Is the Problem?

Youth dropouts are not a small problem segment of our country's adolescents:

- Fourteen to 25 percent of students entering high school will not finish.[1]
- Of the fall 1983 ninth-grade class of 3.3 million, 470,000 to 830,000 students will drop out before graduating.[2]
- Of 16.8 million youth aged 18 to 21 in 1983, as many as four million had been or still were high school dropouts.[3]

Who Drops Out?

Obviously, some students are more likely to drop out than are others. According to the High School and Beyond Survey, a national longitudinal survey of 30,000 randomly selected 1980 sophomores:

- Fourteen percent of sophomores will drop out, including 12 percent of whites, 17 percent of blacks, and 19 percent of Hispanics.[4]
- Urban youth are 50 percent more likely to drop out than are rural youth.[5]
- White students in the South and West are almost 40 percent more likely to drop out than are those in the Northeast and the North Central states, while the reverse is true for black students.[6]

Youth who are least prepared economically and educationally are most likely to drop out.[7] For example:

- Twenty-two percent of students from low-income families will drop out, in contrast to only seven percent of those from upper-income families.
- Students who drop out are about twice as likely as those who do not to have a parent who never completed high school.

- Students who score low on achievement tests are six times as likely to drop out as are those who score higher.

- Twenty-seven percent of students who repeat one or more grades never complete high school, in contrast to only 12 percent of other students.

- Being overaged for grade level substantially increases a student's chances of dropping out.

Dropouts were found to have been less involved in school activities and more involved in outside employment while in school than were their peers who graduated. For example:

- Students who drop out are far less likely to participate in extracurricular activities, particularly athletics, while in school.[8]

- Eighty-two percent of sophomores who later drop out attended classes regularly in contrast to 93 percent of those who stayed in school.[9]

- Students who report that they have had disciplinary problems, have been suspended, or have been put on probation are about three times as likely as others to drop out.[10]

- Students who work 15 or more hours per week are at least 50 percent more likely to drop out than are those who work less or not at all.[11]

Taken together, however, the strongest determinants of whether students will drop out are their educational and economic backgrounds.[12]

Why Do Students Drop Out?

While poor academic performance and low-income family status are strongly correlated with being more dropout-prone, these qualities are not the causes for leaving school early. After all, 73 percent of sophomores who have repeated a grade and 78 percent of those from low-income families do successfully complete high school.[13]

There are many personal and social pressures that are highly correlated with poor academic performance and poverty, and these can affect success in school. Most evidence on these causes, however, comes from students' own explanations. Findings from the High School and Beyond Survey show common reasons for dropping out, many of which differ strongly by sex:[14]

- About one-third of all dropouts reported leaving school because of poor grades or because school was not for them.

- Young men commonly explained that they left school because they could not get along with teachers (21 percent) or were expelled or suspended (13 percent).

- A common reason for young women to drop out was that they were getting married (31 percent) or were pregnant (23 percent).

- Twenty-seven percent of the young men and 11 percent of the young women reported leaving school early for work reasons.

- Less than seven percent of all dropouts gave illness or disability as the reason for leaving school.

While dropouts give the foregoing as their reasons for quitting school, it is evident that these explanations are insufficient by themselves, since other students with the same kinds of problems stay. It may be that a combination of these problems, the severity of an individual problem, or the unavailability of alternatives is the deciding factor for leaving school.

Educational specialists have also begun exploring the role schools play in discouraging students from staying. Rigorous attendance and disciplinary policies combined with tougher academic and promotion standards could inadvertently "push" poorly performing students out, unless these policies are followed up with appropriate remediation and support services.

What Are the Consequences of Dropping Out?

Once out of school, youth dropouts have two options. They can complete their education by returning to school or getting their high school equivalency diploma (GED), or they can try to get by through employment or other means with their limited educational preparation.

Many dropouts sooner or later pursue the first option. Within four years of dropping out, half of all dropouts tracked through the High School and Beyond survey had reentered school or were in GED classes.[15] Thirty-eight percent of all dropouts actually returned and graduated or obtained their GED.

The dropouts who do not complete their education, however, find that their lack of academic preparation limits their employment options and thus their economic and social futures. For example:

- Youth dropouts are less likely to be in the labor force—68 percent of dropouts and 87 percent of school graduates aged 16–24 were in the labor force.[16]

- Even when they are in the labor force, youth dropouts are less likely to have jobs—75 percent of dropouts in contrast to 90 percent of high school graduates are employed.[17]

- If employed, youth dropouts have limited opportunities—only eight percent of male dropouts, but 20 percent of male graduates, are employed in technical, administrative support, and sales occupations.[18]

- The limited employment opportunities translate into cumulative lifetime earnings differences—estimates show that the expected lifetime earnings of dropouts are about one-third less than those of high school graduates.[19]

What Is the Public Policy Picture?

Public and political concern about the relationship between quality of education in America and our nation's future economic preparedness has led to competing policy initiatives. Frequently, the response has been to make grade promotion and graduation requirements more rigorous. But critics claim that such reforms ignore the educational needs of disadvantaged students. They believe that the solution is not to create more barriers to learning but to give students extra help in realizing their academic potential.

Meanwhile, economists and demographers have become increasingly concerned about the potential labor market impact of changes in the demographic composition of our labor force. The decline in our youth population, coupled with the growing proportions of that population that are minority, disadvantaged, and poorly educated, projects a dim picture for future productivity. And, by the same token, our labor market offers fewer opportunities than in the past for those without a high school diploma.

In anticipation of these problems and in an attempt to intervene more effectively, states and local communities have begun to explore how to serve their youth dropout population. The most common approach is to add new funding—generally or specifically for programs directed to preventing students from dropping out. Increasingly, too, state and local agencies are initiating collaborative projects, such as combining education and employment and training resources and services to serve these youth comprehensively.

WHAT CAN BE DONE?

From a review of the nature and context of the youth dropout problem, several program planning principles become clear. Because dropping out is a complex problem that stems from numerous causes and because it exists in varying degrees, several kinds of programmatic solutions are needed. And because the problem is the responsibility of many service sectors, these solutions ought to come from many sources. But the solutions are not limited to designing and adding new programs. Indeed, it seems that resolving the youth dropout problem requires a systemic change in our schools and our accountability as communities, states, and a nation.

What Has Been Tried?

Despite the severity of the problem and the many resources directed toward resolving it, little is known about where to begin and how. Until recently, only three general approaches existed to serve potential dropouts or those who have left school:

- compensatory education;
- alternative education; and
- employment and training programs.

While information on the effectiveness of these approaches is limited, there are examples of each that illustrate useful ways of serving potential and actual dropouts.

Compensatory education. This approach encompasses primarily reading and mathematics assistance for poorly performing students. It has been established in local schools through substantial federal, state, and local funding directed to serving economically disadvantaged students experiencing academic problems, most of them in elementary school. Limited evaluations have demonstrated the effectiveness of compensatory education in improving achievement in reading and math among participants in comparison to other students. And to the extent that educational performance reduces the chances of dropping out, compensatory education is a useful strategy. But the available compensatory education programs serve only half of the eligible students.[20] As the disadvantaged student population increases and funding decreases, these resources will be spread even more thinly, further limiting possible impact.

Alternative education. Public schools also commonly offer many kinds of alternative programs for special-needs students, including those likely to drop out. While no large-scale evaluation has been done of such programs, there is some limited evidence of their effectiveness in serving potential dropouts. A survey of sampled students in California found that enrolling in an alternative school improved potential dropouts' chances of graduating. Students who as sophomores thought they might not finish high school were twice as likely to stay in school subsequently if they participated in alternative programs as were similar students who did not enroll in these programs.[21]

Employment and training programs. The third primary approach to serving youth dropouts is through the highly decentralized and diverse public employment and training programs. In these programs, which are usually funded through federal and other public and private sources, economically disadvantaged youth and adults receive training, employment preparation, and job placement. Reviews of the outcomes of demonstration youth employment and training programs implemented during the late 1970s show that work experience is not enough to address the employment needs of these youth or to encourage them to return to school long enough to graduate. Youth dropouts may need more job readiness training and support services as part of an overall program. Finally, youth dropouts need an educational program that addresses their basic-skill deficiencies while preparing them for employment.[22]

What Makes Programs Work?

The lessons learned from the existing approaches to serving dropout-prone youth demonstrate necessary program features of service delivery, instructional content, and staff and organization. The following features are recommended:

- *Size*: Programs should be kept small to facilitate an intimate and supportive environment for students and a collegial relationship among the staff.

- *Content*: Instruction should include basic-skill remediation, employment preparation, and job training to assist students both in graduating from high school and in preparing for post–high school employment.

- *Structure*: Academic instruction and experiential learning, such as employment training, should be mixed to reinforce each other.

- *Support*: Programs should be structured to help students cope with social, economic, and other problems that are barriers to their continued education, either directly or through referral.

Establishing separate programs for dropout-prone youth is not enough, however, to solve the country's dropout problem. As the National Coalition of Advocates for Students has recommended, there is a need to review the delivery of services generally, to improve all students' chances for maximum educational attainment, and to prevent the need for more dropout prevention services later.

A Program Framework

Based on our review of the nature of the youth dropout problem, the kinds of services available, and recommendations on what is needed, we have devised a program planning framework of a range of approaches. This framework is structured around four groups of students, differentiated according to the severity and causes of dropping out:

- students who are still in school, but who are marginally at risk of dropping out;

- those who are interested in staying in school, but cannot because of personal circumstances, such as the need to work or adolescent parenthood responsibilities;

- students who are at great risk of dropping out, as evidenced by their lack of interest, poor attendance, and poor academic performance; and

- those who have already left school, but need services to complete their education and thus become better prepared for employment.

In addition, selected program designs and their administration should reflect certain assumptions about service needs: Multiple services should be incorporated; and they should draw upon the resources of a number of agencies and interested parties.

The Framework Components

The above recommendations were considered in devising the program framework. The framework groups programs in a progression of service strategies and program organization, from the simplest to the most complex. The framework has six components, which are described below.

Supplemental services. This first type of program provides supportive counseling and job readiness preparation to marginally performing students who are still in school. While these programs are limited in scope, they can be sufficient to encourage some dropout-prone students to complete high school. Programs of this type are best for youth who are likely to drop out because they are uninvolved in school activities, have poor opinions of themselves, or lack post–high school plans. Creation of support groups or part-time employment is a low-cost means of assisting these youth. These programs can be easily sponsored by organizations external to the schools, but they can be integrated with an existing educational program.

Removal of barriers to continued education. The second group of programs is designed for youth whose economic, family, or personal responsibilities keep them out of school. These programs are structured in ways that help students

cope with their competing responsibilities and provide a means for them to complete high school. For example, a school-based day-care center permits teenage mothers to continue with their high school course work. Such programs, because of their attention to external problems, can often be funded through state and federal sources specifically designed for these support service needs.

Comprehensive school-affiliated programs. The third group is made up of comprehensive programs for students who are likely to drop out because of serious academic and attendance problems. These programs often combine an array of education, employment preparation, and counseling services for potential dropouts in a comprehensive, multiservice approach to encourage students to remain in school. They are designed to address early manifestations of academic and attendance problems intensively. These programs can easily make use of private-sector resources for program content and funding.

Services for out-of-school youth. The fourth category includes comprehensive programs for students who have already dropped out. They offer a menu of services to be combined in one program to address the many problems facing youth dropouts. The assumption behind these programs is that it is unrealistic to assume that many students who quit school will later reenter. Their main focus is on helping young people to achieve basic-skill performance levels and to pass the GED, while helping them to prepare for employment.

School system–wide approaches. The fifth type of program illustrates how school systems can combine targeted and general strategies to increase the number of students who stay in school and graduate. This approach reflects an acknowledged responsibility to prevent substantial percentages of students from dropping out. This is done by combining alternative programs for students at risk of dropping out with consideration of ways to restructure the schools to respond better to students' varied educational needs.

City-wide approaches. The sixth type goes beyond the school system–wide approach to encompass the larger community or city. It is a strategy that draws upon resources of businesses, universities, and other social agencies. It assumes that dropping out is more than a school system problem. Like the school system–wide approaches, this approach reflects a perception that the problems that cause students to drop out actually affect a much larger group of students than just the dropouts themselves. This perception has stimulated an interest in improving the way schooling is organized and the way community services are incorporated.

STRATEGIES THAT WORK

The program framework described above is illustrated here with 14 program examples. Collectively, the programs provide a useful starting point from which schools and communities can begin to address their dropout problems. At the very least, these programs illustrate useful lessons in what works and why. They show ways of tailoring services to special needs—through access, curriculum content and structure, staffing and resources, and funding. More important, they provide a framework for defining potential roles for schools, businesses, and other interested parties and for identifying segments of the at-risk population that are often underserved. The 14 programs, as listed in the table on page 15, are summarized in the section that follows.

Program Design

The programs vary widely in design, but all reflect common short- and long-term goals. In the short term, the program staff have tried to keep youth engaged academically:

- to give them basic reading and computational skills;
- to expose them to the world of work; and
- to prepare them for employment.

The long-term goals of the 14 programs are:

- to see that the young people graduate from high school or pass the GED; and
- to see that the youth become employed or go on to advanced training.

The programs can be distilled into four components for dropout prevention and service:

- basic-skills remediation;
- world-of-work exposure;
- personal development; and
- supportive services.

These components are what potential and actual youth dropouts most needed to sustain them in a program and to prepare them to complete high school (or get a GED) and to prepare for employment. Because of their differing aims and purposes, the 14 programs place different emphasis on these core features.

Most of the 14 programs have addressed the major flaws of earlier approaches by putting a strong emphasis on basic-skills improvement and on assistance with personal and family problems. The strong emphasis on employment preparation and work experience serves a dual function. It makes it clear to youth that without a diploma their options are limited, and it helps them to make the transition into a good job after graduation. All programs reflect an awareness that different incentives are needed to encourage young people to return to school and to motivate students to complete school.

The 14 programs use primarily one of three methods to deliver these core services:

- a uniform program approach in which all students participate in the same set of classes;
- a menu approach, allowing students and staff to select services to shape individual programs; or
- an indirect intervention aimed at changing the school delivery system to respond to the varied educational needs of students, with the intention of reducing the need for a separate dropout prevention program.

Collaboration and Funding

These 14 programs were purposely selected to illustrate collaborative efforts among schools, service organizations, and businesses in serving youth dropouts or redirecting potential dropouts. Through these collaborations and the use of different resources, the programs have effectively tapped numerous funds and in-kind contributions to create and sustain various program components.

For example, at least four programs either received federal job training money for summer youth employment placements or were assured slots in other similarly funded programs. Students who had good attendance and performed well academically could be rewarded with a guaranteed summer job. In another example, a program used workers on loan from city social service agencies as its counseling staff.

Of particular interest is the private-sector role in many of the program examples. Increasingly, local businesses recognize the link between the quality of existing educational services and their future work force. These programs illustrate ways for local businesses to make substantial in-kind contributions toward targeting resources for poorly performing students. These contributions ranged from loaning space and staff to jointly sponsoring programs and planning initiatives.

Effectiveness

The 14 programs included here represent model approaches to working with potential and actual youth dropouts. While very few have been extensively evaluated, the available evidence is quite positive. The outcome measures all show good retention of students, improved attendance rates, academic gains, and good completion and graduation rates. While not all programs included have yet produced evidence to demonstrate their effectiveness, they are promising approaches to helping potential and actual youth dropouts complete their high school education.

Selection Considerations

Our overriding priority in designing this resource was to select programs that illustrated the range of approaches that was possible in delivering services. Within this general objective, additional considerations helped us to narrow and refine the selection.

The first consideration was the quality and creativity of the program in combining services and resources. The lack of adequate funding and the complicated and often interrelated problems associated with dropping out of school call for the creative mixture of resources to provide many services.

A second consideration was the replicability of the programs and strategies. To encourage replicability, every attempt was made to document the effectiveness of each program strategy. In some cases, however, programs had limited evaluation information. The reader is cautioned wherever such information is unavailable.

The third consideration was to represent a cross-section of the regions and demographics of the United States. However, programs were selected primarily from urban areas, where the school dropout problem is most severe.

Using the Summaries

Each program summary described below offers some insight into what ought to be considered for program adaptation or incorporation, in whole or in part. The summaries are capsules of more in-depth discussions of the same 14 programs contained in the sourcebook. Those interested in the fuller description can order the sourcebook, *Keeping Students in School*, by Margaret Terry Orr, from Jossey-Bass Inc., Publishers, 433 California Street, San Francisco, California, 94104 (telephone 415-433-1767).

TABLE OF PROGRAMS

Supplemental Services

Twelve-Together

Adopt-A-Student

Summer Youth Employment Program

Programs to Remove the Barriers to Continued Education

Secondary Credit Exchange Program

Murray-Wright High School Day-Care Center

Adolescent Primary Health Care Clinic

Comprehensive School-Affiliated Programs

Job Readiness Program

Project COFFEE

Rich's Academy

Services for Out-of-School Youth

Alternative Schools Network

Educational Clinics

School System–Wide Approaches

A Systemic Approach to Dropout Prevention

Dropout Prevention and Recovery Program

City-Wide Approach

Boston Compact

TWELVE-TOGETHER
Detroit, Michigan

Program Components

- **Supplemental counseling program focusing on problem-solving and academics**
- **Peer-group meetings**
- **Volunteer adult advisers**
- **Cooperation between school district and community organization**

Program Inputs and Outcomes

- **Target:** **12 high- and low-risk 9th graders in each of Detroit's 20 high schools**
- **Costs:** **$460 per student; contributed space**
- **Outcomes:** **Improved attendance and academic performance**

Twelve-Together is a community-based program that organizes groups of 12 ninth graders (the age-group most likely to drop out) in each of the city's 20 high schools into peer-counseling groups. Six successful students are placed with six poorly achieving students for weekly peer-counseling sessions under the guidance of two adult volunteer advisers per group.

The program is run by the Detroit Metropolitan Youth Foundation as a dropout prevention effort for Detroit's youth. The Detroit schools, like many urban school systems in the United States, have a high cumulative dropout rate—45 percent—for their entering ninth graders.

The program is based on the theory that "positive peer pressure" can help teenagers deal effectively with their problems and support one another's attempts to stay in school, reinforcing attendance, achievement, and ultimately graduation for all 12 students in each group. Peer-group counseling is believed to be effective in helping to reduce the stresses that inhibit young people's ability to stay in school, to increase students' belief in themselves and their abilities, and to provide positive reinforcement to their desire to graduate. In the trusting atmosphere of the peer group, youth can help each other understand and solve their problems, develop and articulate their goals, and attend and complete school.

The peer-group process is highly structured to foster intergroup dependence that program staff hope will last throughout high school. The program also reinforces academic effort. To join Twelve-Together, students pledge to study 1½ hours per day and to attend peer-group sessions and academic forums. The two-hour peer-group meetings address one student's problem each week, focusing equally on school, family, and personal problems.

Through the use of volunteer advisers, the program operates as a low-cost counseling program for dropout prevention. The Detroit school system allocates space, while the supervising staff salaries and other expenses are supported through foundation grants and corporate gifts. A federal grant will permit substantial program expansion in 1986-87.

Program staff have documented increasingly positive results when comparing participants and nonparticipating students. Participating ninth graders were more likely than those in the comparison group to be promoted into the next grade. Overall, students have shown improvement in self-esteem development, motivation, problem-solving abilities, and interpersonal skills.

For more information, contact:

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313-864-0700

ADOPT-A-STUDENT
Atlanta, Georgia

Program Components

- **Supplemental program focusing on post–high school plans**
- **Business volunteers as mentors**
- **Monthly job preparation workshops**
- **Weekly consultant-student activities**

Program Inputs and Outcomes

- **Target:** **High school students from the bottom 25% of the class**
- **Costs:** **Volunteer time from business employees; public school space and administration**
- **Outcomes:** **92% graduation rate; 93% job placement or postsecondary education enrollment rate**

The Adopt-a-Student program pairs business volunteers as mentors or "big brothers/sisters" with low-achieving high school juniors and seniors. Through monthly job preparation workshops and a relationship with a volunteer, students are encouraged to finish high school and develop post–high school career plans. The program is jointly run by the Atlanta public schools and the Merit Employment Association (MEA).

While the cumulative dropout rate in Atlanta is relatively low (15 percent), many high school graduates are unemployed. In response, Atlanta's mayor and superintendent of schools have mobilized public and private resources to better prepare youth for employment. In 1983, school officials appealed to the MEA, a professional association of personnel employees, to devise a program for students in the bottom quartile of their class who had few or no post–high school plans. Without assistance, these students might not complete school, or, if they did, would be ill-prepared for employment. The MEA responded by designing and sponsoring Adopt-a-Student in cooperation with the Atlanta public schools. The program provides a unique career-oriented support system for low-achieving 11th and 12th graders.

The focus of the mentoring relationship is to have adult volunteers (called "consultants") help students think concretely about their future employment, identify their occupational interests, and begin taking steps to get a job that matches them. Consultants meet weekly with students to share an activity—anything from tutoring to attending basketball games. Students and consultants also attend the monthly job preparation workshops together. Consultants provide world-of-work exposure by taking students to see their worksites and discussing their own careers.

The school system coordinates with the MEA, contributing space for meetings and personnel to select and supervise students. The MEA members volunteer to be consultants, coordinators, and planners.

Since 1983, participation in the Adopt-a-Student program has grown from 10 students in two schools to 210 students in all 21 Atlanta high schools. In addition, the preliminary evaluation results show the program to be quite successful. According to a study of students from the 1985–86 program year, 75 percent rated the program highly. Ninety-two percent of seniors had graduated, in contrast to 84 percent of a comparison group of nonparticipants. Six months after graduation, 93 percent of participants were employed or in a postsecondary educational program.

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SUMMER YOUTH EMPLOYMENT PROGRAM
New Bedford, Massachusetts

Program Components

- **Short-term work experience program**
- **Summer job placements**
- **Work enrichment activities**
- **Basic-skills training**
- **Job readiness course**

Program Inputs and Outcomes

- **Target:** **JTPA-eligible youth aged 14–21**
- **Costs:** **$1,234 per youth for salary and placement; employer-contributed work experience and salary enrichment**
- **Outcomes:** **Not ascertained**

To provide youth with a range of vocational experiences and educational support along with summer employment opportunities is the objective of the summer jobs program of the New Bedford Private Industry Council, through the Office for Job Partnerships (OJP). To this end, the OJP has developed diverse private- and public-sector summer jobs varying in skill level, along with enrichment activities and supplemental academic work. The program is a unique example of expanding the learning opportunities for youth through summer jobs and remedial instruction or enrichment activities.

In 1986, 1,297 young people worked 25–30 hours per week for seven weeks in a variety of entry-level jobs. Almost half were placed in jobs that included vocational enrichment or were supplemented with academic instruction. They worked 25 hours and spent five hours per week in enrichment activities. For example, 33 girls worked as aides at day-care centers and had classes in child development. Seventy-three youth needed remedial instruction and enrolled in learning centers that offered self-paced, computerized instruction.

The remaining applicants were not interested in related instruction or academic assistance and were placed in jobs with work experience only, primarily clerical, laborer, or aide positions. All the youth participated in a job readiness course, the Labor Market Orientation Program.

The program staff solicit both youth and employers to be matched for the summer jobs. Applicants aged 14–21 who are eligible for the Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA) meet with placement counselors to develop employment plans and assess their need for academic assistance. Local employers pledge summer jobs, outlining responsibilities and the content of the enrichment activities. On the basis of their skills and interests, applicants are referred to employers, who can decide to hire them.

All staff salaries, as well as those of the employed youth, are paid through the summer youth employment portion, Title II-B, of the local area's JTPA funds. The program cost $1.6 million to operate in 1986. An additional $18,700 was contributed by private-sector employers to pay for the enrichment activities.

The OJP has yet to conduct a formal evaluation of the Summer Youth Employment Program, but there has been very good feedback on the program from employers. Staff are striving to expand the enrichment activities and provide more counseling and career planning guidance.

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SECONDARY CREDIT EXCHANGE PROGRAM
Washington State

Program Components

- **Accessible, comprehensive instructional program for working students**
- **Interstate student record transfer system**
- **Cooperative relationship among school districts**
- **Evening school program covering 4–5 courses**
- **Focus on basic skills**

Program Inputs and Outcomes

- **Target:** Secondary school migrant youth
- **Costs:** Unknown
- **Outcomes:** Unknown

As of 1980, 422,000 children nationwide— including 84,000 adolescents—were migrants. Such young people often go to school in the winter, when little work is available. In the spring, those 13 and older usually stay out of school to work in the fields. Without a means of coordinating their education program across districts and states, few migrant students would ever be able to complete high school. The Secondary Credit Exchange Program of Washington State offers working migrant youth evening secondary school classes and transfers the credits they earn back to their home schools in Texas, California, and elsewhere in Washington.

This program approach illustrates how local school districts can adjust their structure to the employment needs of those they are to educate and how states and their districts can cooperate in managing a joint education program.

The program is essentially an evening junior and senior high school program that provides as much educational continuity as possible across school districts for 650–750 migrant students. Home schools design the curriculum and course of study for each student, which receiving schools try to match and complete. The sending schools recruit students in the winter, before they move north. Students' course information is transmitted on an automated data system, designed for all migrant children and youth nationwide, to Washington State.

After the working day, students in grades seven through 12 are transported from the camps to a local high school for instruction in four or five academic subjects. The instructional emphasis is on basic skills. At the end of the program, successfully completed credit hours are transferred back to the students' home schools for course credit.

The program is under the direction of the migrant education staff of Washington State's education department. School districts volunteer to offer the program and support it with local basic education funds, supplemented by federal compensatory education monies.

The program, which began in 1970, was evaluated in 1977; at that time, the staff provided evidence of program effectiveness to gain National Diffusion Network–approved status. But the report lacked information on the long-term educational gains of the students. While no figures are available on the percentage of participants who complete school through the program, it is obvious to the state and districts' staff that the Secondary Credit Exchange Program is necessary and well utilized.

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MURRAY-WRIGHT HIGH SCHOOL DAY-CARE CENTER
Detroit, Michigan

Program Components

- **School-based infant-toddler day-care center**
- **Year-long parenting education program**
- **Integration with regular high school program, making continued school feasible for teen mothers**

Program Inputs and Outcomes

- **Target:** **Low-achieving AFDC-eligible teenage mothers**
- **Costs:** **DSS daily reimbursements of $11.04 per child; contributed space and utilities; Chapter 1–funded support staff**
- **Outcomes:** **50–75% of teenage mothers graduate**

Recognizing that poor teenage mothers would be unable to complete their high school education without day-care assistance, staff from Murray-Wright High School established an on-site center for infants and toddlers in 1974. Teen mothers can drop off their children before school begins and be assured that they are well cared for during the day.

The school dropout rate in Detroit is very high—45 percent cumulatively. One of the most common reasons girls give for dropping out is parenthood. Murray-Wright is the only school that offers day care. The center was established in response to a request from students. From the beginning it was inundated with applications from students who wanted to enroll their children; however, there is room for only 20 babies and toddlers.

AFDC-eligible teenage mothers who are two years below grade level are selected to enroll their children in the program while they continue with their regular high school classes. First-year mothers are required to take a parenting class, which covers maternal and child health, childrearing, and problem-solving techniques.

For the children enrolled in the day-care center, the day is divided into periods reflecting the school's class schedule. Structured activities and free play alternate with meals and snacks provided by the school.

The center is staffed by a teacher-coordinator, a full-time nurse, two paraprofessionals, and student volunteers. They offer a structured and supportive environment for teen mothers and their children, providing informal counseling and social service referrals. Though the staff are careful to be nonjudgmental, they encourage the young mothers to finish school, to avoid a repeat pregnancy while in school, and to follow appropriate child-care practices.

The day-care center is part of the Home Economics/Vocational Education Division of the high school. It is supported by local school district funds, Chapter 1 (federal compensatory education) monies, and reimbursements from state-administered federal social service funds. The program illustrates an effective way for two public systems—education and social services—to target assistance for poor teenage mothers.

Since its beginning, the program has helped 20 mothers stay in high school each year. The staff estimate that 50 to 75 percent of the mothers go on to graduate, and repeat pregnancies are rare.

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ADOLESCENT PRIMARY HEALTH CARE CLINIC
Houston, Texas

Program Components

- **Free year-round health clinic**
- **Comprehensive remediation and job preparation services for teen mothers**
- **Dropout prevention program for preadolescent boys**

Program Inputs and Outcomes

- **Target:** **Students at nine middle and high schools; teen mothers; high-risk preadolescent boys**
- **Costs:** **$300 per student in the clinic; $2,500 per teen mother in the training program; $4,500 per student in the Fifth Ward Enrichment Program**
- **Outcomes: Not determined**

The Adolescent Primary Health Care Clinic, which provides services to students in eight junior and senior high schools in one of Houston's poorest areas, has initiated dropout prevention and service programs that build upon the clinic's medical care and counseling. Established in 1981, the clinic is sponsored by the Urban Affairs Corporation, a private, nonprofit human services agency. The clinic provides free health care to eligible students and their children. In 1984–85, the clinic served 1,100 students, 14 percent of its target population.

Housed with the clinic in a converted junior high school is a program serving over 200 pregnant and parenting teenage girls, called Training and Employment for Adolescent Mothers (TEAM) II. TEAM II provides day care, medical services, preemployment and vocational training, and placement and educational services to AFDC-eligible young women aged 14–22. TEAM II explicitly targets the dual problem of teen pregnancy and dropping out of school. About 80 percent of participants are dropouts; the program encourages them to return to school and complete their education.

In addition to the program to aid young mothers, the clinic has initiated the Fifth Ward Enrichment Program, which targets 30 preadolescent boys at risk of dropping out of school. Through early intervention, the program aims to instill a sense of the importance of education, help the boys with personal problems, and ease their transition into junior high school. In seventh grade, the boys are entered in remedial classes during school and participate in academic, therapeutic, and enrichment activities after school. Through intensive counseling and reinforcement of good behavior, the program encourages them to stay in school and succeed.

Both TEAM II and the Fifth Ward Enrichment Program draw on the medical care, social services, and counseling and referral resources of the clinic in providing comprehensive care to their target groups. The two programs are separately funded through a mixture of foundation and Texas Department of Human Services funds, with space and resources contributed by the Houston Independent School District.

No comprehensive program evaluation has been undertaken for either the clinic or the TEAM II program. However, the Fifth Ward Enrichment Program is being evaluated by the Hogg Foundation; preliminary results show marked improvement in students' attendance, grades, and classroom behavior.

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JOB READINESS PROGRAM
Chicago, Illinois

Program Components

- **Comprehensive 9th–12th-grade program for dropout-prone youth**
- **Basic-skills focus**
- **Summer job incentives for good attendance and academic performance**

Program Inputs and Outcomes

- **Target:** **400–500 low-achieving high school students**
- **Costs:** **$340–390 per student for support staff; in-kind private-sector and school contributions**
- **Outcomes:** **Reduced school dropout rate; improved attendance and academic achievement; improved attitudes**

The Job Readiness Program is the result of a cooperative effort between the Chicago public schools and Chicago United, a nonprofit organization of local business leaders, to ease the transition between school and work for inner-city youth. The program operates in two high schools, providing basic-skills remediation, employment training, and counseling to 200 youth per grade who perform at least two years below grade level. The program was designed as a response to the serious concerns of employers about the lack of basic skills and employment preparation among Chicago's high school graduates.

The two schools provide contrasting settings: Dunbar Vocational High School has a comparatively low dropout rate (28 percent cumulatively) but many poorly achieving students, while Farragut Career Academy is a comprehensive high school with a high dropout rate (55 percent).

The Job Readiness Program reorganizes the academic structure for targeted students, providing them with additional support in basic-skills improvement, self-esteem counseling, and development of employability skills. Participants are grouped for home room and clustered for academic classes.

Students in the Job Readiness Program at Dunbar choose to major in one of five vocational areas: electronics, machine drafting, architectural drafting, graphic arts, and business. At Farragut, participants take a vocational survey class, rotating every 10 weeks through four occupational areas: health services, food services, computer services, and business.

Summer and after-school job opportunities serve as an incentive to good student performance. Students who maintain a 95 percent attendance rate and pass all their courses are guaranteed summer jobs. Those who receive excellent recommendations from their summer employers are referred for the best part-time jobs during the school year.

The Job Readiness Program is supported by a direct grant from the Edna McConnell Clark Foundation. In addition, it receives extensive in-kind contributions from the school system and the private sector.

Evaluations show that students participating in the Job Readiness Program have improved their attendance and academic achievement in comparison to a group of nonparticipants; school retention rates have also improved. Moreover, participants have more positive attitudes about themselves, school, and future employment plans than they had before entering the program.

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PROJECT COFFEE
Oxford, Massachusetts

Program Components

- **Comprehensive vocational program**
- **Integration of academics, occupational training, physical education, and counseling**
- **Job training and work experience**
- **School-business partnership**

Program Inputs and Outcomes

- **Target:** **Potential dropouts from 16 regional school districts**
- **Costs:** **$3,000 per student, excluding transportation; internship sites; business support**
- **Outcomes:** **Lower dropout rate; improved attendance and basic skills**

Project COFFEE—Cooperative Federation for Educational Experience—is a regional alternative school located in Oxford, Massachusetts, with satellites in the neighboring towns of Auburn and Webster. It provides instruction and occupational training for about 120 eighth through 12th graders at risk of dropping out, referred from 16 neighboring school districts. The program is sponsored by the Oxford public schools, through a joint partnership with several high-tech businesses and industries, most notably the Digital Equipment Corporation.

The program serves a rural, economically depressed area of southern Massachusetts. The 16 school districts have a combined student population of 40,000, with an annual dropout rate of three to four percent.

The components of Project COFFEE—academic instruction with an emphasis on basic skills, preemployment training, educational internship, vocational and personal counseling, and a physical education program emphasizing recreational activities—provide potential dropouts with a learning alternative and job training. Each student is given an individual instruction plan and participates in three academic courses and two periods of occupational training each day. Students with advanced occupational and social skills are scheduled for limited unpaid internships.

Students enroll in one of five occupational training programs: computer maintenance and repair, word processing, horticulture and agriculture, distributive education, or building and grounds maintenance. All programs except the last operate as small businesses.

The cost of operating Project COFFEE was $3,000 per pupil plus transportation in 1985–86; this is about 20 percent higher than the cost of regular day school. Each school district pays the full cost for each student it places in the program, using local school district appropriations and federal special-education funds. The program receives considerable support from businesses, particularly the Digital Equipment Corporation.

Since 1979, 85 percent of participants have graduated or have been mainstreamed back to their sending schools. Students have shown consistent improvements in their attendance rates and significant gains in their test scores in reading, language, and math. The program's partnership with business and industry has been critical to its success. Project COFFEE has twice demonstrated its effectiveness to the Joint Dissemination Review Panel.

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RICH'S ACADEMY
Atlanta, Georgia

Program Components

- **Comprehensive alternative school for referred potential dropouts**
- **Department store setting**
- **Full high school program**
- **Strong emphasis on self-confidence**
- **Contributed social services support staff**

Program Inputs and Outcomes

- **Target:** **Dropouts and at-risk youth**
- **Costs:** **$2,600 per student; contributed space; volunteer assistance**
- **Outcomes:** **85% complete high school; all graduates go on to jobs or postsecondary school**

Rich's Academy is an alternative high school serving 110 students, former dropouts or near-dropouts, nearly all of whom are black and poor. Located in Rich's, a major downtown Atlanta department store, the Academy is one of the Cities-in-Schools programs administered by Exodus, Inc., an Atlanta-based nonprofit corporation. The Academy was established in 1983–84, when the president of Rich's, Inc., who had a strong interest in helping disadvantaged youth, offered space in the downtown store and made himself and his staff available to support program operations.

The primary objectives of Rich's Academy are to motivate students to attend school on a regular basis and to enable them to acquire the confidence and skills needed to obtain a high school diploma. Academic courses follow school system guidelines; both required courses (English, social studies, science, and math) and electives are offered. Remedial classes are required for those performing below grade level in reading and math. Students are placed at random into "family groups" of 20–30 members that meet daily for group counseling and mutual support. The Academy has an "extended day" program that runs until 6:00 P.M., allowing time for tutoring and extracurricular activities.

Staff members provide the students with supportive counseling and referrals as needed. Volunteers play a vital role in the program. Rich's employees can volunteer their time during working hours, tutoring students, exposing them to different jobs within the store, and helping with special activities. Parents are encouraged to participate, and the staff visit each student's home at least once to share the program objectives.

Rich's Academy is funded through a mixture of sources and in-kind contributions. The Atlanta public schools provide the teaching staff and materials. Rich's contributes space and related expenses. Exodus supports the social services staff, except those loaned by city and county agencies.

The message that Rich's Academy tries to infuse in all activities is that there is no substitute for self-esteem. The program's clear goals and structure, its committed staff, its combination of school and social services, and its unique connection with a private-sector resource, Rich's store, make it a strong model for meeting the diverse needs of its target group. This is reflected in the program's 70 percent graduation rate and 15 percent rate of return to regular high school as well as in students' achievement test score gains—averaging one grade level annually in reading and math.

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ALTERNATIVE SCHOOLS NETWORK
Chicago, Illinois

Program Components

- **Collective of alternative schools and GED-preparation programs for out-of-school youth**
- **Neighborhood learning centers**
- **Open-entry, open-exit program at some sites**
- **Comprehensive Competencies Program for self-paced basic-skills and employment preparation instruction**

Program Inputs and Outcomes

- **Target:** **Neighborhood school dropouts**
- **Costs:** **Not calculated**
- **Outcomes:** **60–70% high school/GED completion rate**

A group of 35 community-based alternative schools and youth centers in Chicago provide a structured program of education, employment preparation, job training, and counseling. These local agencies serve approximately 2,000 youth dropouts aged 14–21 annually, most of them poor and minority, helping them get a high school diploma, return to public high school, or obtain a GED.

With a cumulative dropout rate of 53 percent, the Chicago public high schools lose approximately 14,000 students per year. The education and training services of the Alternative Schools Network, established in 1973, represent the only substantial and widely available learning alternative for out-of-school youth in Chicago.

The 35 Network affiliates include 23 alternative schools and 12 youth service centers. Each agency provides dropouts with diagnostic tests, counseling and referrals, and individually designed, self-paced instruction programs. Job readiness instruction is an important component of the programs.

The alternative schools offer English, math, science, social studies, health, and career education—the components needed to meet state requirements for a high school diploma. In contrast to the schools, the Network-affiliated youth centers run on an open-entry, open-exit basis. Dropouts often come to the centers for employment and support services; academics are usually a secondary concern.

In 20 of the schools and the youth centers, the Comprehensive Competencies Program (CCP)–an individualized, self-paced teaching system, based on sequenced workbooks and computer software—is becoming the primary educational method. Through the CCP, students can prepare for the GED, improve their basic skills, and achieve competence in various areas.

By combining as the Alternative Schools Network, community-based agencies are able to do joint fundraising and state and local advocacy work on behalf of their constituency. The program is supported by these locally raised monies and by substantial JTPA funds.

Participants in the Alternative Schools Network program achieve 60–70 percent high school and GED completion rates; however, no other comprehensive evaluation information on the program is available. The program illustrates an effective way for community-based organizations to target the needs of youth dropouts in their neighborhoods and to work together in raising funds and designing a focused program.

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EDUCATIONAL CLINICS
Washington State

Program Components

- **Local centers for GED preparation and high school reentry for youth dropouts**
- **Small classes with basic-skills focus**
- **Counseling and referral**
- **State support**

Program Inputs and Outcomes

- **Target:** **Dropouts aged 13–19**
- **Cost:** **Per-student reimbursement of $636 in 1984–85; in-kind local agency support**
- **Outcomes:** **66% returned to school or got a GED or a job; 62% of former students were doing well six months later**

Washington State, through a 1977 state law, funds nine educational clinics designed to provide short-term educational intervention services to out-of-school youth. In addition to basic academic skills instruction, the clinics provide employment orientation, motivational development, and support services. One for-profit and eight nonprofit clinics annually serve 1,750 young dropouts throughout Washington.

The goal of the clinics is to serve dropouts by individually diagnosing instuctional needs and setting a course that allows students to proceed at their own pace toward returning to public school or passing the GED test and going on to work or further education. To qualify for the program, applicants must be younger than 20, out of school at least 30 days, and below high school proficiency level in basic skills. Each applicant begins by taking a standardized achievement test. The student then reviews the test results with a staff member. Together, they agree upon academic, employment, and personal goals for the student.

Prescribed basic-skills courses—math, speech, reading and composition, science, history, literature, political science—are taught in small groups or individually. The clinics also offer employment orientation—workshops, guest speakers, help in resume writing, released time for job interviews.

Clinics differ widely in their size, clientele, and type of sponsoring agency. Nine organizations operate clinics at 16 sites, either as their principal function or as part of multipurpose agencies. Clinics serve as few as eight to as many as 100 students at a time. All employ state-certified teachers and are open year-round.

The clinics operate under contract with the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction. They are reimbursed only for time spent in testing and instructing students. Detailed performance standards provide the clinics' incentive to be cost-effective, serving each student, on average, for $636. The state funding formula used to determine each clinic's allocation emphasizes targeting the hardest-to-serve youth and delivering instruction efficiently. Sixty-six percent of the students successfully complete the program by obtaining a GED, transferring into another educational program, or obtaining full-time work.

The clear framework of the program's design and the performance evaluation for its state funding formula make it a readily transferrable program model. Two other states, Colorado and California, have implemented similar state-funded programs for youth dropouts.

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A SYSTEMIC APPROACH TO DROPOUT PREVENTION
New York City

Program Components

- **Comprehensive dropout prevention strategy, including attendance follow-up, support services, and alternative education**
- **Targeting students with worst attendance**
- **Establishing school-specific goals for reduced dropout rates**
- **Long-range plans for dropout service expansion**

Program Inputs and Outcomes

- **Target:** **Middle and high school students in schools with very low attendance rates**
- **Costs:** **About $1,000 per student**
- **Outcomes:** **Not ascertained**

New York City's efforts to reduce its high dropout rate combine two system-wide strategies. One is to make middle schools and high schools responsible for academic performance levels and dropout rates. The other is to direct a mix of support services to the students most likely to drop out, as exhibited by their poor attendance.

New York City's cumulative dropout rate for high school students was estimated to be 35 percent in 1984–85. With a total student population of over one million and with decentralized elementary and middle schools, it has been difficult for the school system to respond to its dropout problem.

Through a series of New York State and New York City policy decisions on school and student performance standards, the New York City school system has developed a standard approach to reducing its dropout rate. According to 1984 state guidelines, all schools are required to meet at least minimum levels in reading and math test scores, attendance, and graduation rates. New York City board guidelines require that each school performing poorly in these areas develop a comprehensive plan for restructuring its programs. The board has set as a goal a maximum high school dropout rate of 7.5 percent annually (or 27 percent cumulatively). Schools with higher dropout rates must show significant progress—at least a 50 percent reduction—within three years.

Through substantial new state and city funding, the school system was able to implement comprehensive attendance improvement and dropout prevention services by 1986–87 in the 97 middle schools and 36 high schools with the lowest attendance rates. Each school's program targeted 150 poorly attending students, and each included specific core components: attendance outreach; health services; guidance and counseling; links between middle and high schools; and alternative education programs. Several programs collaborated with commmunity-based agencies on service delivery.

The outcomes of these programs and the comparative benefits of the different program designs are being evaluated by the New York City board of education and an external evaluation team. While it is too soon to determine any school-specific or system-wide benefits and improvements, it appears that the two-pronged approach to dropout prevention is a sensible means of serving students most in need while prompting schools to evaluate and improve their educational programs, thus reducing the need for more dropout prevention services.

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DROPOUT PREVENTION AND RECOVERY PROGRAM
Los Angeles, California

Program Components

- **Pilot dropout recovery and prevention programs in elementary, junior, and senior high schools**
- **Improved system-wide student tracking and reporting**
- **System-wide focus on dropout prevention**

Program Inputs and Outcomes

- **Target:** **150 high-risk students in each targeted school; all students for other efforts**
- **Costs:** **$280 per student in the city-funded pilot programs**
- **Outcomes:** **Preliminary improvement in student retention, attendance, and achievement**

In September 1985, the Los Angeles Unified School District initiated the high-priority Dropout Prevention and Recovery Program. According to district plans, the program's overall goal is to reduce "the number of dropout and dropout-prone students by increasing the individual school's holding power and by developing alternative educational programs." The overriding program thrust is to integrate community services and private-sector involvement with new and ongoing district programs to improve school retention.

With 578,760 students in school year 1985–86, Los Angeles has the second-largest public school system in the nation. Like other major urban centers, it is grappling with a student enrollment that is increasingly minority, poor, and educationally disadvantaged. The dropout rate is very high: 42 percent cumulatively in 1984.

The Dropout Prevention and Recovery Program, funded with local school district monies, combines two system-wide planning efforts to address the dropout problem. First, each school is required to prepare its own dropout prevention plan as part of the required biennial basic education plan. To aid in the planning process and to track its dropout problem, the district has funded a school-based computerized student accounting system in grades seven through 12. Second, the district is experimenting with several model programs that span all school levels, reflecting the view that the dropout problem must be addressed by a concentrated, locally designed and centrally coordinated effort.

In 1985–86, eight high schools with high dropout rates and 16 of their feeder middle and elementary schools were targeted to pilot model programs, receiving $1 million to initiate them. Approximately 3,600 students are being served, 1,200 in each of the three school levels. The 24 schools all have large numbers of at-risk students, although only a few can be served by the programs.

While all the pilot projects provide counseling and tracking, they differ in program specifics, ranging from self-contained (school-within-a-school) programs to those that attempt to change school structures, regulations, and staff attitudes. Some offer targeted students more intensive academic attention, while others mainstream them in regular classes.

In late spring 1986, the district began evaluating the first year's activities. Interim results showed that the pilot programs were effective in pupil retention; close to 80 percent of the targeted students were still in school.

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BOSTON COMPACT
Boston, Massachusetts

Program Components

- **Collaborative planning between the school system and other city-based interests to reduce the dropout rate**
- **Measurable objectives for school improvement and youth employment, agreed to by the public schools and businesses, universities, and labor unions**
- **Pilot dropout prevention program for high-risk 9th graders**

Program Inputs and Outcomes

- **Target:** **Boston high school students**
- **Costs:** **Not calculated**
- **Outcomes:** **Increased achievement, attendance, and hiring of school graduates**

The Boston Compact brings together the resources of the public schools and the business, university, and labor communities to improve students' achievement and work preparation in exchange for increased opportunities in employment and higher education. The Compact is a formal, objective-based agreement that stipulates the contributions each entity will make to improve education performance, school attendance, and post–high school opportunities.

In 1982, when the Boston Compact was initiated, the Boston public schools were at their lowest point, while the economy was improving. About 16 percent of the high school students left annually, and less than 60 percent of any entering high school class was graduating.

The Boston Compact evolved from a number of new school system and business collaborations. According to the terms of the Compact, the schools agreed to reduce the dropout rate by five percent annually and to work toward increases in attendance and test score performance. Businesses agreed to give priority hiring status to a specific number of graduates, to increase the number of summer jobs for in-school youth, and to sign up at least 200 companies for a priority hiring effort.

Later, the Compact was expanded to include colleges, which agreed to the goal of a 25 percent increase by 1989 in the college enrollment rate among Boston public school graduates, and labor unions, which pledged openings in apprenticeship programs to Boston graduates on the condition that the schools offer union-designed training curriculums.

Currently, there are two kinds of efforts under way to address the dropout problem systemwide while serving those at risk. In the first, the school system is attempting to initiate a dropout prevention plan that will bring in broader community resources and address structural barriers to school retention. The second is Compact Ventures, a pilot program sponsored by the Boston Private Industry Council in cooperation with the schools, which targets high-risk ninth graders in two schools, providing them with supportive services and employment incentives.

Of its four primary goals, the Boston Compact has been most successful in improving the employment of graduates. Some progress has been made on improving attendance and academic achievement, but the dropout rate remains unchanged. While increasing their efforts to address the problem, Compact participants recognize that the hoped-for changes could take a decade or more to occur.

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IMPLICATIONS

It is obvious from the size and persistence of our nation's dropout rate that reducing it substantially will not be easily accomplished. The 14 programs described here are a good starting point for planning and targeting services for youth dropouts. Several useful program developments are emerging. First is the recognition that youth dropouts and potential dropouts are not a singularly characteristic group and thus no one program model is best. School districts and communities are now adding a variety of programs to meet these varied needs. However, more systematic planning and coordination of services around the various kinds of dropout-prone youth are needed to ensure that service gaps are filled.

Second, there is a growing acceptance that the causes of leaving school early are not limited to the problems of those who drop out. Rather, schools and communities are beginning to change institutional factors that may address problems affecting the broader student body. In addition, educators are looking for earlier signs of potential school dropouts. In some elementary schools, such as those in Los Angeles, officials are adding educational and support services to prevent at-risk youngsters from ever becoming dropout-prone.

Finally, recognition of the diverse causes and consequences of dropping out has led to greater collaboration among schools, businesses, universities, and social service agencies to address the dropout problem. Such collaborations have begun to bring more resources to bear and have generated creative solutions for dropouts' education and employment needs. School systems' resources are too limited to encompass all the services needed to assist dropout-prone students or to serve the youth dropouts they have persuaded to return. Also, many support services currently available in public and private agencies can complement existing education or employment and training programs. This extends the programs' scope and reinforces the educational objectives.

A two-pronged approach to dropout prevention would seem to be most effective—targeted programs for various groups at risk of dropping out and systematic redress of the educational delivery system to encompass a broader range of learning needs. However, this approach can only be successful in reducing the dropout rate if two conditions are met.

The first is the need for information. Only limited findings exist on what makes a given program successful and under what conditions. Moreover, too little is currently known about what strategies are most effective and what combination works best for different segments of the potential and actual youth dropout population. Therefore, implementation of dropout prevention and service programs ought to be combined with systematic evaluation of the programs and their impact on participants' educational achievement and employment. Similarly, strategies to improve the scope and delivery of education generally should be assessed to see whether they reduce school dropout rates and improve students' academic performance overall.

The second condition for success is for school systems and their communities to share responsibility for addressing the needs of the entire dropout-prone and out-of-school population. Currently, schools, employment and training programs, and community agencies provide fragmented support for this population; rarely do they plan collaboratively or systematically. Sharing responsibility can clarify the extent to which the problem exists in a given community. It can also help engender support from a broad public and private base and can ensure more targeted solutions.

There is a temptation to look for an ideal program approach to working with youth dropouts. But the scope and complexity of the national dropout problem require many solutions. The framework and program examples illustrated in this summary present ways for local communities to plan and organize services for various segments of their dropout problem. Ideally, such service targeting would be combined with a comprehensive review of city-wide educational services and delivery systems, as is being undertaken in Boston, Los Angeles, and New York. This combined approach will ensure support for today's dropout-prone youth as well as help reduce the need for future crisis intervention.

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